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Dear Dr. David Kessler

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I sent a letter to
USDA secretary Dan Glickman
conveying my concerns regarding
Bio-Engineering and am
enclosing a copy to you. Please
do consider these concerns.

Steve Arpin

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332-B Barnard Ave.
Asheville, N.C. 28804-3201
September 15, 1999

Dan Glickman, Secretary
US Dept. of Agriculture
200-A Whitten Bldg.
1400 Independence Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Glickman:

Not having a crystal ball, I don't know for certain what is ultimately best for the development of life on earth. Still, I do wish that you would consider the concerns, thoughts, feelings, and wishes to follow.

I'm deeply opposed to the genetic modification of food organisms and of other organisms. Like many, I'm greatly concerned with the biological dangers and the potential for control associated with this technology. I'm disturbed that this is being done at all and I'm further upset with the way it is being done: putting Bt genes into plants increases the likelihood that pests will develop resistance almost to the level of a certainty. In spite of reading the EPA response to the white paper of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), I am still concerned about using genes which convey antibiotic resistance as markers. The situation in which the larvae of monarch butterflies died from eating leaves dusted with Bt-corn pollen reveals our potential for blunders. I believe this will not be the last unanticipated development/loss of life to a non-target species if we continue along this road.

With modifications such as Terminator and Traitor, and being able to secure patents on seeds, and the continued buying out of smaller seed companies by huge multinationals, we are witnessing the development of an alarming situation: a few large corporations are gaining greater and greater degrees of control over the world's food seed supply. Individual and community seed-saving self-reliance is being replaced with dependence upon corporate suppliers.

I read about "Gene Police" going into Percy Schmeiser's fields in Saskatchewan, Canada, uninvited, to snip samples of his crops for DNA testing and then Monsanto's suing him for seed piracy. Percy explained that what they found was the result of pollen coming from a neighbor's field. I also read some on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR's) on seeds, which can make seed-saving-and-exchange illegal. This is immoral, alarming, and frightening. Our agricultural seeds come to us from nature and the propagative and selective work of countless generations of farmers and gardeners.

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No farmer or gardener wants to live in fear of being arrested for performing the age-old task of saving seeds for oneself and others. Humanity's agricultural seed inheritance should not become the personal property of a few giant multinational corporations.

Transferring responsibility for seed-saving and development and control over seed availability from the hands of many into the hands of a few will result in virtual enslavement to the agenda of the seed companies as well as forboding further losses in the genetic diversity of our food crops. Our government should not be assisting these companies (I read that USDA and D&PL jointly hold the patent on Terminator Technology) in developing these techniques nor granting patents on seeds, but rather should be protecting its citizens and the rest of humanity from these threats to health, life, and freedom.

The best way to protect seed diversity and availability is to increase decentralized participation. We need to develop programs which encourage and support the re-emergence of multitudes of small farmers and home gardeners and develop programs which assist them in becoming skilled at seed-saving and in developing healthier strains. In addition, we need people whose primary responsibility is saving seeds and developing healthier strains for their region, as opposed to primarily growing food. Social networks among farmers, gardeners, and professional seed-savers could facilitate the sharing of seeds, knowledge, and fellowship. Please help to shift our government's role from one of assisting (either intentionally or unintentionally) multinational seed companies in their efforts to create dependence upon them to one of spreading control over seed availability into as many hands as possible.

I work a great deal in my home garden and enjoy saving seeds. Accumulating in my maturing seeds is the miracle of life anew, the promise of another harvest, a connection with the past to which we are beholden, and a responsibility to the future. The specter of going out to my garden and seeing my seedpods full of seeds that have been genetically altered to commit suicide is unbearable. This is greatly contrary to nature's design.

Nature is not only around us but also inside us. We human beings, like other higher forms of life, reproduce through seeds. Life ever-renewing itself through seeds is and has been the order flowing through us and around us since time immemorial.

Our inner natural order is repulsed by Terminator Technology. Even though we may ride in cars and wear synthetic clothing,

the old order still flows deep within us. Terminator plants do not share with us nature's spirit of renewal. Practically everyone responds to the magic and mystery of seeds producing life anew. If we engineer this out of seeds, especially the seeds of our food supply, we will soon find ourselves feeling as lifeless as our engineered seeds.

We need to take a long, hard look at all that's associated with unbridled technology, unlimited growth, and excessive centralization and concentration of control. Personally and collectively we need to become highly selective as to what we pursue and adopt. Just because we can do something does not necessarily mean that we should. Most new developments are showing themselves to be inferior in the long run to time-tested ways. We should keep and foster only those developments which are truly life-affirming and life-enhancing.

I just read about more new developments in bioengineering, one being bioengineering strains of plants in which normal healthy functioning is impossible without the application of corporate chemicals. Obviously these companies are attempting to force us to become dependent upon them. Purposely creating weaknesses is not how we ought to be using our capabilities. I feel uneasy about this. Again, we shouldn't grant people patents for this sort of behavior but rather enact laws against it.

We human beings are susceptible to the corrupting influence of power. We would be wise to not underestimate this susceptibility and neither seek for ourself/selves nor grant to others excessive power/control. To do otherwise is to invite tragedy, hardship, and sorrow. Also, no one is capable of understanding and directing the more than billions of interactions responsible for gene regulation in the biosphere. Life is incredibly complex, interrelated and interdependent. Proceeding without adequate awareness of the whole picture has already brought us a host of toxic chemicals and a grossly devitalized food supply with all the associated chronic and degenerative conditions we suffer from. Everyday stories appear which reveal how our well-being is dependent upon factors and relationships heretofore either unknown or inadequately appreciated. Our ignorance and lack of respect is made painfully apparent through personal and trans-generational deterioration. How important is the natural genetic ordering to individual, collective, and planetary well-being? I suspect that it's far more important than we can imagine.

The likelihood that bioengineering will lead to further biological blunders, perhaps on a scale unimagined, and social disaster if the seed companies accomplish their aims

-4-

of forcing us into dependency leads me to advocate, call for an end to these ominous developments.

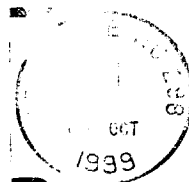
In summary, we need to declare a moratorium on genetic engineering, legislate immediately against techniques like Traitor and Terminator, and bring all of this before the public for review and discussion.

Sincerely,

Steve Arpin

Steve Arpin
332-B Barnard Ave.
Asheville, N.C. 28804-3205
Phone 828-252-7737

Steve Arpin
32-B Barnard Ave.
Steville, NC 28804-3205



Dr. David Kessler
FDA Commissioner
HF-1
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857